

Li Peng calls for stronger ties with Southeast Asia

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 22: Chinese Premier Li Peng on Friday indicated China would support the concept of a Southeast Asian forum that would voice the region's consensus on global economic and political issues, reports AP.

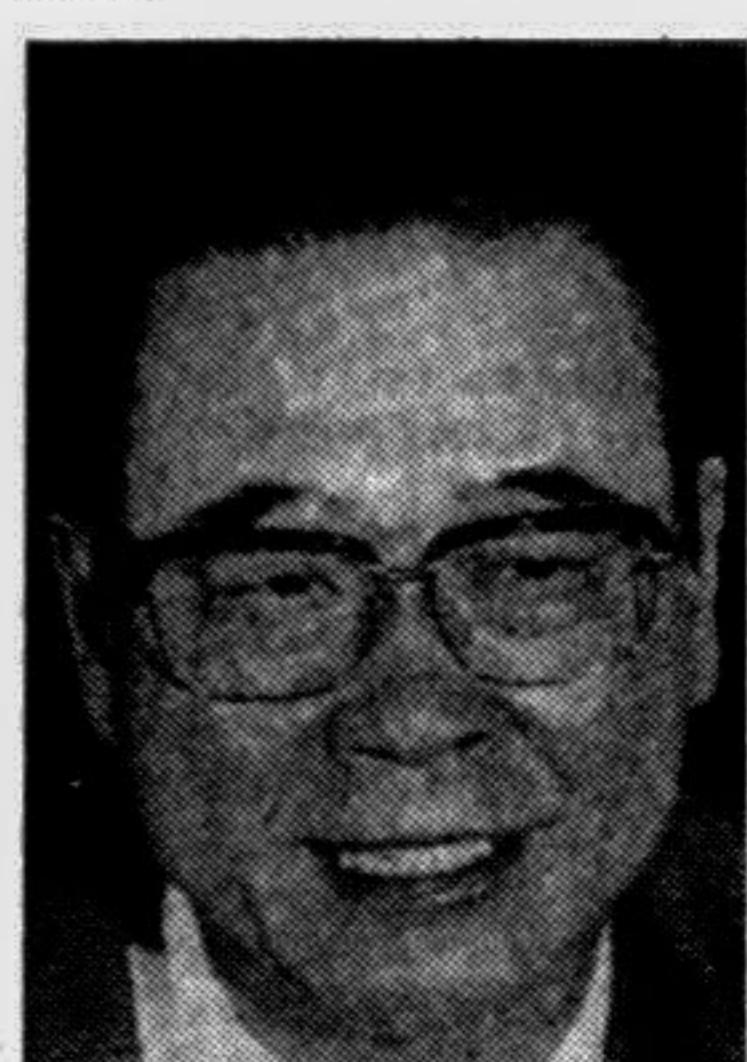
In a major policy speech before the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations in the Malaysian capital, Li said China must establish stronger ties with Southeast Asian countries. He also said China backed a review of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, which Asian nations believe focuses too much on individual rights.

"Let us join hands in a concerted effort to promote the establishment of a fair and just new international political and economic order characterised by peace and stability," Li said.

"Politically speaking, there exists inequality, some countries attempt to lead the world and some also attempt to bully the weak and the poor," Li said.

Li said Chinese President

Jiang Zemin would attend a meeting of East Asian nations in December along with South Korea and Japan after the ASEAN summit. He called the meeting "a major event in the history of China-ASEAN relations."



It will be the first time the Chinese president will attend an East Asian gathering and indicates China's support for

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Netanyahu in Tokyo: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu arrives Tokyo Sunday for visit focusing on boosting economic ties but his mission is clouded by the current tensions between Israelis and Palestinians and the crisis in the peace process. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Netanyahu, accompanied by a team of 24 Israeli businessmen, will on Monday speak to members of the Keidanren, the federation of economic organisations, and meet its President Shoshiro yesterday.

Intl aid for China: Poor rural families in China are receiving aid from different countries through the partnership between the Chinese Association for International Understanding (CAFIU) and plan international yesterday's China Daily reported. Xinhua reports from Beijing.

The poverty relief programme, which have already started in Beijing and Shandong Province, will expand to the provinces of Gansu and Ningxia and the Ningxia Hui autonomous region within two years, the paper said.

US war ships arrive in Ecuador: Ships from the United States and Colombian navies arrived in Ecuador Thursday for a three-day joint naval exercise with Ecuador. Xinhua reports from Quito.

The US and Colombian ships arrived at the port of Manta, in the western province of Manabi. The maneuvers include exercise in continental defence including anti-aircraft, Submarine, surface, and electronic warfare, said an Ecuadorian navy spokesman.

5 miners killed in Russia: Five Russian miners were killed in an explosion at a mine in the Kemerovo region of Siberia, officials said Friday, AP reports from Moscow.

The miners' bodies were found by rescue workers following an explosion Thursday night at the Kiselevskaya-12 mine in the town of Kiselevsk, said Emergency Situations Ministry spokesman Viktor Belov. He said rescue workers planned a second trip into the mine to determine the cause of the explosion. Russian news reports said the blast likely was a methane explosion, possibly caused by an electric equipment fault.



Paula Corbin Jones (L) and her spokeswoman Susan Carpenter walk Thursday, along the Los Angeles airport corridor on their way to Little Rock, Arkansas. Jones is expected to attend meetings pertaining to her sexual harassment lawsuit against President Clinton.

—AFP/UNB photo

3 executed in China: Shanghai judicial authorities have executed three people for selling fake value-added tax receipts, a news report said yesterday. AFP reports from Shanghai.

The three men, Chen Huan, Zhang Heping and Lu Dehua, had their death sentences upheld by the Supreme People's Court and were executed here Thursday. The Xinhua news agency said.

The three men had been convicted of selling 106 fake value-added tax receipts amounting to 450 million yuan (54 million dollars).

Blast kills 3 in Bogota: Three brothers, aged between 10 and 12, died in an explosion thought to have been caused by a grenade as they made their way home from school on Thursday, Colombian police said. Reuter reports from Bogota.

Luis Fernando, Carlos and Jose Vicente Mendez were believed to have found the discarded hand grenade and began kicking it, a police spokesman said.

But one witness said the trio had been playing on a hillside in a working-class district of northern Bogota and may have accidentally rolled on the device.

Villager shot dead in Indonesia: One villager was killed and three soldiers were injured when tribesmen used bows and arrows to attack an Indonesian army patrol in New Guinea on Friday, a military source said. AP reports from Jakarta.

The incident took place outside the town of Timika, about 3,320 kilometers (2,000 miles) east of Jakarta, near the Freeport Indonesia copper mine operated by Freeport-McMoran Copper and Gold Inc. of New Orleans.

The mine is in the mountainous center of Irian Jaya, the western half of New Guinea island, governed by Indonesia.

International

Violence feared in S Lebanon after roadside bombing

Arafat meets militant groups defying US, Israeli criticism

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Aug 22: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat defied Israel and US criticism Thursday to meet for the second time in two days with Islamic groups who openly back armed attacks against the Jewish state, reports AFP.

But at the same time Arafat's self-rule police arrested two West Bank militants of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in an operation linked to last month's Jerusalem suicide bombing. Palestinian sources said.

And the director of Arafat's office, Tayeb Abdul Rahim, criticised Palestinian opposition groups opposed to the autonomy accords with Israel.

Arafat believes the region needs united clout in international forums which address trade, economic and political issues. ASEAN, although an up-and-coming economic group, does not have the economic clout of Japan and South Korea or the power status of China to get its views heard.

Japan has been hesitant to express public support of the forum, partly because of its close ties with Washington.

He appealed to the groups for unity in the face of harsh Israeli sanctions which followed the July 30 bombing and reaffirmed that his aim remained to achieve a "peace of the brave" with Israel despite Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's

right-wing policies.

But the Palestinian leader also rejected Israeli "dictates" that he arrest scores of militants to counter the threat of terrorism.

AFP adds, a roadside bomb killed a truck driver in southern Lebanon Thursday, raising fears of a new round of attacks between Israel and Hezbollah guerrillas.

The Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army blamed Hezbollah. But the pro-Iranian guerrillas accused Israel of setting off the bomb as a pretext to justify retaliatory attacks.

A similar bombing on Monday sparked three days of violence, including shelling of the port city of Sidon by SLA militiamen — that killed six people — and guerrilla rocket barrages on northern Israel.

This month's violence between Israel and guerrillas has killed 25 people in Lebanon, most of them civilians, and injured three in Israel.

Thursday's bombing came a day after Israel sent jets deep inside Lebanon, targeting a guerrilla base in the east, an electricity pylon in the central region and a Lebanese army artillery battery in the south.

But their numbers are a mere fraction of the half a million who fled last year's 16-day Israeli bombings of the south.

Timur Goksel, spokesman for UN peacekeepers in south Lebanon, and Sheik Nabil Kaouk, Hezbollah's commander in the south, met Wednesday and urged southerners to stay put.

Four Lebanese were injured.

There were fears of more reprisals and counterattacks after Thursday's bombing near Jezzine, a Christian mountain town, 40 kilometers (25 miles) southeast of Beirut. The town is controlled by the 2,500-strong SLA militia that helps about 1,500 Israeli troops patrol an occupied border enclave in southern Lebanon.

Shops and businesses closed in Jezzine after warning sirens wailed. The town's 5,000 remaining residents, down from 30,000 in recent months, stayed indoors and fled further south toward Marjayoun in the Israeli-occupied border enclave.

Since the eruption of violence on Monday, hundreds of residents in guerrilla-controlled territory have headed north to safer areas.

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Communists for formal apology

Queen free to travel in India: Gujral

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: Backtracking from an earlier statement asking Britain's Queen Elizabeth II not to visit the northern state of Punjab, India's Prime Minister has said she can travel freely in his country, newspapers reported Friday.

"She is welcome to visit any part of the country," Inder Kumar Gujral was quoted as saying on Thursday in the Times of India and The Asian Age.

Britain's Observer newspaper earlier this week quoted Gujral as saying the government had asked the queen to skip the Sikh holy city of Amritsar because of a massacre there by British forces in 1919.

Relatives of massacre victims had demanded that the queen apologize for the killing of 379 civilians and wounding of 1,200 others. Britain ruled India for some 200 years until 1947 and the queen's visit was to commemorate 50 years of Indian independence.

The queen is expected to make the trip, her third to India, in October. But the exact date and itinerary have not yet been finalized.

Gujral's retraction came after criticism in the Indian press and even politicians in Punjab who may have been worried

about possible repercussions on Britain's large Sikh population.

"The government does not want any controversy concerning her visit," Gujral was quoted as saying.

AFP adds: India's major communist party joined the call for Queen Elizabeth II to issue a formal apology for a civil



ian massacre during the British Raj, a newspaper reported.

The Communist Party of India's Marxist (CPM) said the queen should not visit the Indian city of Amritsar, where the massacre occurred in 1919, without agreeing to make a formal apology.

Low-caste Hindus barred from entering into temple in Bihar

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: High-caste Hindus have defied Indian law by denying low-caste members of their community entry into temple in the eastern state of Bihar, a news report said today, says AFP.

The priest at a shrine of Lord Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, on Monday barred low-caste Hindus from the temple during a religious festival in a village in Bhojpur district, the Indian Express reported.

It is unfortunate the incident took place in the golden jubilee year of India's independence, a member of Bihar's ruling party was quoted as saying.

Hindus, India's majority community, are divided into a myriad of castes. High-caste Hindus have traditionally looked down upon low-castes, treating them as "untouchables."

Velayati appointed int'l affairs advisor

TEHRAN, Aug 22: Iranian ex-foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati was appointed international affairs advisor Thursday by the Islamic Republic's supreme guide, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Radio Tehran said, reports AFP.

In a letter cited by the radio station, Khamenei said his decision was based on "Velayati's long experience at the head of the Iranian foreign ministry."

Velayati, who served as foreign minister from 1981 to 1997, had already been appointed by Khamenei to the government's highest strategic decision-making council, chaired by former Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

The former foreign minister had openly sided with the conservative candidate for president, Ali Akbar Nategh Nouri, who was soundly defeated by new president Mohammad Khatami.

Kenyan govt, opposition urged to enter into dialogue

NAIROBI, Aug 22: Thirteen western states Thursday urged government and opposition in Kenya to enter into a dialogue in order to ensure that elections to be held later this year are free and fair, reports AFP.

In a joint statement issued by the US embassy here, the condemned an outbreak of bloody violence in the coastal region of the east African state and urged all parties not to allow the violence to deflect them from dialogue.

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"Lady Moura", a 105 metre long luxury yacht, belonging to Nasser al Rachid, first Cousin of Saudi Arabia's King Fahd, cruises 21 August in the bay of Cannes. Several yachts, belonging to wealthy Gulf Arab oil sheiks, along the Cote d'Azur in August.

— AFP/UNB photo

LTTE agrees to release DPRK's merchant ship

COLOMBO, Aug 22: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas have agreed to release a North Korean merchant vessel they seized after killing one crew member, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said today, reports AFP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were prepared to hand back the 3,000-tonne MV Morang Bong which was captured on July 8 off the island's northern coast, ICRC spokesman Harsha Guawadawana said.

"The crew men will be taken over the weekend to inspect the ship and work out the possibilities to take it out," Guawadawana said. The vessel is believed to be held somewhere in the island's north-east.

The Morang Bong was returning from the northern peninsula of Jaffna when it was boarded by armed Tiger guerrillas who later announced that they will attack any ship taking supplies to the region.

Government forces wrested control over Jaffna after driving out the Tigers in December 1995 but the rebels still control the main land route to the region, forcing the military to supply Jaffna by sea and air.

On July 1, the LTTE torched a 500-seater passenger ferry in the north-western manner region. The rebels said the ships were helping government forces with transport.

Plane carrying anti-Taliban leaders crashes

KABUL, Aug 22: A cargo plane carrying top leaders of Afghanistan's anti-Taliban coalition, including the group's new prime minister, crashed Thursday killing everyone on board, a coalition spokesman said.

At least seven top officials with the northern-based alliance, including newly appointed Prime Minister Abdul Rahim Ghafurzai, died in the crash in Bamyan, 150 kilometers (90 miles) northwest of the Afghan capital, Kabul.

Ghafurzai was appointed prime minister within recent weeks by leaders of the northern alliance, which controls the northern third of Afghanistan.

The spokesman Abdullah told The Associated Press by satellite telephone. "All the people on board were killed on the spot."

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